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Guests

Tipitaka Yaw Sayadaw

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Translated from the Myanmar
by TAF

528 Publications

A GIFT OF DHAMMA—NOT FOR SALE

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Guests

We call a person who comes to see us for a short time and then leaves a "guest." There are two kinds of guests—invited and uninvited. We can always estimate the number of invited guests we might receive, though even invited guests sometimes show up with other friends of their own.

As for uninvited guests, we have no idea who they will be, how many there will be, or when and where they will show up.

Any number of people could show up at any time and place. We are all liable to be visited, and it is certain guests will come—it's unavoidable.

Two types of guests come to see us:

1—Those whose visits we find pleasing and enjoyable, and we are sad to see them go.

2—Those whose visits we find burdensome, and we are relieved when they finally leave.

Also included among the guests we receive are any material possessions that we might acquire. These things won't stay with us forever. When the time comes, they, too, must leave us one way or another.

If we look at *saṁsāra* on the whole, we can see that all of our friends and relatives are likewise simply guests. Within the boundary of time that is governed by *kamma*, they come for a short while, and then when their time is up, they have to leave. In this respect, even our own bodies get included on the guest list. We have no right to remain permanently—we come for a limited time, and when that time is up, we have to go.

When we direct ourselves toward the noble attainment of *nibbāna* by using *sati* wisdom and ardently performing *kusala*, a great force results. This force is a true host and will stay with us until we attain awakening. The *khandhas* will move on, but the goodness we develop through the *pāramis* will not. This goodness won't be diminished or run out; in fact, it will strengthen. The pāramis will always follow us, shaping our attributes. As evidence of this, consider how the goodness of our *bodhisatta's* pāramis continuously followed him until his awakening.

Neither our possessions nor our lifetime can last forever—they are limited in that they either decrease, or get exhausted after getting used on a daily basis. They are visitors that

must go according to whatever time they have. And since all of our family and friends are guests too, they also must go when their time comes. Kusala is the one thing that will stick with us without ever leaving. That's why, whatever type of guest we have visit us, we should accept each one while maintaining our kusala.

Whenever a guest leaves, the host must see them off kindly. The merit that remains will persist through each change, day by day, month by month, year by year, and life by life.

Those who are troubled, and those who are at peace.

There is physical pain, and there is mental pain. As long as there is a body, there will always be the pain of instability that comes with it. When discomfort arises from being in one of the four postures—either sitting, standing, walking, or lying down—we can only get relief by changing positions. Just try staying in one posture for a long time without moving. Muscle stiffness and achiness will become very apparent. If there is a body, there will be pain. Although the mind is also touched by events, the resulting pain isn't always obvious, like it is with the body.

Whether the cause is from something inside the body going wrong, or from getting an injury due to an external cause like an accident, the type of pain that results is physical. In other words, the pain that arises in the body when circumstances take a turn for the worse is physical pain. The pain of being oppressed by the consequences of impermanence is always present, so we can say that pain is a host pain. The pain that is not ever-present, but only appears when circumstances go wrong, is like a guest pain. And if that pain is going to continue its assault all the way up until the death of the body, it too has become a host pain.

Usually, whenever a kilesa crops up in us, the mind is pained. All kilesas are nothing but pain. But whenever people are dealing with their kilesas, they don't see the distress in their own minds. Take lobha, for instance—we predictably create unwholesome mental states rooted in lobha and even enjoy the feelings that result. And it's not until anger and displeasure turn into burning hatred that we usually acknowledge just how aggravated the mind is. And it's not until displeasure turns into rage that we say our hearts are burning with anger. If our hearts were actually on fire, we wouldn't be able to stand the pain.

If we have a physical pain and we can find the right medicine for it, it can be easily cured. However, this isn't the case when it comes to mental pain, so recovering from that can be slow. Mental pain will only truly be cured by treating it with the medicine of the Dhamma. We can patiently endure bodily pains, but few people have the capacity to withstand mental pain. Because we can't endure such pain, we go on giving both ourselves and those around us trouble and sorrow for the rest of our lives. We can only be completely

cured of our mental suffering by treating it with the Dhamma medicine of *samatha vipassanā,* with sati acting as the medical director.

People with pain fall into two categories: those who are afflicted with sadness on account of it—we'll regard them as troubled, and those who are not mentally affected despite their discomfort. The reason why those who become downhearted and troubled with anxiousness due to a physical injury or disease is that they are not able to set their weakened minds on kusala. Some people, despite being healthy and free of any bodily diseases or disorders, become depressed and anxious due to the adverse effects of mental stress. We can classify them as troubled, too. Whether one has a physical malady or not, if they have mental pain, they are troubled because they can no longer direct their minds toward kusala.

People who have a physical affliction, though, if they are sufficiently developed in sati wisdom, can control their perceptions of their disease or illness and thus remain free and clear of any mental pain. Despite their physical condition, they are not troubled—they are able to resolve themselves on kusala since they aren't in mental distress. It is even possible for a person of this type to benefit from having physical problems.

Long ago, a revered monk named Tissa was living in seclusion in a forest. One night, some hired killers came looking for him. In order to convince them to let him live through one more night so he could meditate, he broke his own thighs as a guarantee that he wouldn't be able to escape. Even with both of his thighs broken, he went all out in his meditation and became an arahant before dawn.[1] When our minds are not affected, we are not troubled. When we aren't troubled, physical pain can bring benefits.

Another incident from long ago saw another forest-dwelling monk get attacked by a tiger as he was meditating. He became an arahant as he continued to meditate even while being eaten by the tiger. He was composed because his mind was not affected, and his physical injuries brought great benefits. On the other hand, if a person is perturbed because of mental distress, they will suffer immensely.

Mental ailments are more frightening than physical ailments. Though you may have a physical ailment, if your mind is in good shape, you can tap into the power of your sati, which is life's essence. If you lose your sati, you will be prone to mental suffering at any time. Just as when the body suffers effects from a stroke and mobility becomes an issue, if the mind suffers effects from a stroke and you no longer have sati, your Dhamma abilities will be very limited. In order to be in good condition, sati must be in full charge. The most powerful force against all suffering is sati—a remedy that is a member of the Seven Factors

[1] Papañca Sūdanī, Majjhima Commentary i.188f

of Awakening. If you look closely with sati wisdom, it's not just the mental ailments that can be cured, but the physical ones, too.

Evil elevates good.

Those in the world who lack wisdom become disgraced due to evil, while those who do have wisdom see their honor become elevated due to it. Just look at the Buddha's quality of *arahaṃ*. He is worthy of respect due to the fact that he completely defeated the kilesas with the supreme path. The kilesas lead to suffering, yet he was able to rise to the heightened nobility of a Buddha owing to them. He achieved the highest pinnacle by conquering the worst mental states. He earned the title of "Purisadammasarathi" (the incomparable leader of persons to be tamed) by being able to tame the wildest and most violent of beings—Aṅgulimāla, the Āḷavaka yakkha, and the elephant Nālāgiri, for example—by his unsurpassable teaching.

The tremendous expertise of doctors and health practitioners comes to be due to the many diseases in the world. They study and become skilled in the field of medicine to be able to defeat serious illnesses, not to shrink away from them. With their skillful attributes, they overcome what is harmful.

Prompted by the khandhas that are burning badly with the kilesas in the body, we can learn from the admirable ones who practice the Dhamma rightly; we can emulate their strengths and abilities. We can challenge and overcome our suffering by putting the Dhamma into practice for ourselves. We don't practice Dhamma just so we can retreat and give up when we are confronted with suffering, but rather so we can challenge and defeat it. A praiseworthy person is one who has the distinction of being able to overcome intense suffering.

The power of medicine and its ability to cure diseases are made known because of illness. Similarly, it is because of the suffering of the khandhas and the burning kilesas that the astounding power of the Dhamma can materialize, leading to the cessation of suffering. Just as a serious illness can reveal the power of the medicine and the capabilities of the physician, the suffering of the khandhas and the burning of the kilesas are forces that can reveal the power of the Dhamma and the potential of the virtuous.

The more serious an illness is, the more evident the power of the physician and the medicine. In the same way, the power of both the Dhamma and the individual can become

more evident the more intense one's suffering is. The strength of the good in the world can be tested by evil. This pertains to anything whatsoever. It is only by undergoing various trials and tribulations that we can be verified as upright and honorable. If you want to know whether or not the power of Dhamma is increasing in yourself, you have to test it through the sense objects that are subject to the eight worldly conditions and the kilesas.[2] If you can withstand the test, you know that your Dhamma strength has grown. If you can't withstand the test, however, then you aren't there yet.

The bad parts of life are not meant to tear us down; they are actually our great benefactors because they are the driving forces that push us to rise higher and increase our capabilities. Being able to endure adversity and misfortune is a true human strength. And just as we need to be able to endure the bad things in life, we have to be careful in how we enjoy the good things, because the way of the world is that at any time, the good can change to bad without notice.

[2] The eight worldly conditions: gain/loss, status/disgrace, praise/criticism, and pleasure/pain. [Lokavipatti Sutta, Aṅguttara Nikāya 8.6]

Love kusala—it is your true friend.

Whether in respect to love for yourself, or love for anything else, be it living or inanimate, there are three types of love.

1—The love of a stranger, which is led by lobha and moha.

2—The love of an enemy, which is led by dosa and moha.

3—The love of a friend, which is led by sati wisdom.

Classified in a different way, there is:

1—The love of a guest.

2—The love of an enemy.

3—The love of a host.

Another way to differentiate it would be:

1—The love that starts out happy but ends in suffering.

2—The coarse love that starts out with suffering and ends in suffering.

3—The refined love that starts out with peace & happiness and ends in peace and happiness.

Whatever happens to be the object of our love, it will only bring happiness if it is the love of a friend, the love of a host, or the love that is for the good of all. Even if an illness arises in our bodies, if we treat it with the love of a friend, it can bestow benefits.

This year is my 45th vassa. I vividly remember a remarkable guest that came to visit me a couple of times. As I said earlier, with some guests, you are happy to see them come and sad to see them go, and with others, you are sorry to see them come, and happy to see them go. This guest was of the latter type.

The first time was at the end of the Rains Retreat when I was struck with stomach pain due to retention of gas. While it lasted for about a week, my activities, such as writing and giving Dhamma talks, went on as usual. When I gave my talks, I would have to press my hand into my stomach. At times, I was sprawled out in my bed and not even able to get up, but I stayed resolved on the view that I couldn't let my work be hampered. My mind wasn't distressed, therefore I wasn't troubled. And since I wasn't troubled, the people around me didn't realize I was in pain. Pain can be experienced with or without awareness, but if the

pain is experienced with awareness, you'll be able to endure it, and you'll get the benefit of the Dhamma due to the pain, as the body's characteristics of *anicca, dukkha,* and *anattā* become more obvious. Before the week was up, the guest left.

The second time was toward the end of December, so it was like a special guest that came to celebrate New Year's. In fact, it was time to start the festivities for the Tipitaka Selection Ceremony at Kaba Aye Pagoda. As I had special duties in regard to this ceremony, I had to go there every day to oversee things, then head back to my monastery in time to give the evening talk.

It was on the evening of the 29th, when I was getting ready to go back to the monastery, that I slipped and fell as I was descending the platform where I had been sitting. I didn't notice any pain, so I got back up right away; it wasn't a conspicuous fall whatsoever. I'm always reminding people to be mindful, and I usually am myself. Though I fell, it wasn't serious owing to the meritorious deeds I frequently perform. It was really just a trivial incident. I told myself I'd just have to bear the consequences of my momentary lapse.

When I got back to the monastery, I gave the evening talk like I usually do. Later, I went into town to give another talk at an ongoing nighttime Dhamma festival. The following day, the doctor found out I was using a pain relief cream on my right arm because it was hurting a bit, and he insisted I go to the hospital for an X-ray. Once there, I found out I had a slight fracture, but was told it wasn't serious, and after resting it for about a week, it should feel fine. So I took a week off from the nighttime Dhamma festival and asked my student monks to give Dhamma talks on my behalf, and it worked out. My students were able to improve their ability to give Dhamma talks, and I was able to follow the doctor's orders for rest. Not a single day of work was lost at the monastery. I was able to keep using my left arm while I rested the right one. It's amazing how our problems can just resolve on their own without us having to do anything. That's the power of the Dhamma.

Are they just coming for a moment, or staying permanently?

I welcomed the pain in my arm with wisdom.

"Hey, pain! Come here, friend. I'm pleased to have you. I've got a special place for you. The body is a place for all sorts of pains. Without a body, pain wouldn't have a place to stay".

"Hey, pain! My body is your body, and I'm happy you're here. Stay as long as you want."

Pain is a guest, so why not welcome it? It's not as if you can drive it out by *not* welcoming it. Try questioning it with wisdom.

"Hey, pain! Now that you've come to my body, are you going to be here for just a bit, or will it be forever?

"I will not stay forever, venerable sir. I will stay as your guest for a while and then leave."

"Since you're a guest, I have to ask what type you are. A stranger? An enemy? A friend?"

"The answer to that question depends on your attitude, venerable sir. If you regard me as a stranger, then I'll be a stranger.

"And if you regard me as an enemy, sir, well, then that's what I'll be. Perhaps even an armed robber. And as such, I will violently take all of your happiness and valuable kusala from you during my attack. And I will keep on harassing and torturing you."

"Or, if you can view me as one, I will be your friend. That being the case, I'll help you with whatever you need, and you'll realize I didn't come here because I want to torment you."

"What exactly could you help me with?"

"I will make the nature of your body known to you. Its nature of anicca—the fact that it must change, and change for the worse. Its nature of dukkha—how it can cause you agony. Its nature of anattā—that you can't get it under your control, it has no permanent essence, and it doesn't follow your wishes. Gaining this knowledge is the most important thing

human life has to offer, and these characteristics become more practical in the presence of pain."

"You're absolutely right. The body's characteristic of anicca has become more evident only on account of your being here. Going from a state of being fairly comfortable to one of being in pain is a significant change. It's so obvious—not a single thing is constant!"

"How the body suffers from the torture of pain! This becomes so clear in times that it must endure such torment! The body's nature of dukkha is being fully revealed in such a direct manner!"

"Only with the presence of this pain has the body's characteristic of anattā become more noticeable. I support the body with its necessities and give it whatever it wants, yet it doesn't follow my wishes. In fact, it's now clearly illustrating how it tends to go against my wishes more often than not. My dear pain, it's thanks to you that I won't be defeated. I indeed will profit from your presence."

"That's right, venerable sir. I'm a special guest that's here to help. By paying a visit to your body, I'm presenting an excellent Dhamma gift to you."

"Abosultely. Thanks to guests like you, I can strengthen my Dhamma practice. The essence of life is no more than the Dhamma. Come back and visit me again from time to time. And while you're here now, you can of course take your time to leave."

"I won't take my time to leave, venerable sir. Even though my being here as a special guest brings you great benefits, your students and supporters, with the help of the doctor, are trying to drive me out. When some people get pain like this in their bodies, it spreads into their minds. They become distressed, saddened, tormented, even. Then they say they aren't well, and they stop doing their work and lie around. But you, venerable sir, didn't skip a day of your work on account of my being here. And when others asked how your pain was doing, you replied, "It's not worth bothering about, it's of no importance." You answered in a way that showed you didn't fear the pain. The mind doesn't become afflicted when it's led by intelligence born of the Dhamma, and because the mind isn't afflicted, you are not troubled. Those who become troubled aren't able to receive me as a friendly guest for even one day, venerable sir.

"I know what you mean. Pain is the push of the Dhamma. If pain leads us to develop skillful perceptions based on the Dhamma, we can say this kind of pain is noble. Long ago, when perpetrators came to kill Mahātissa, he broke his own thighs and, through meditating on his pain, he attained full awakening."

Speech can be unreliable.

When speech begins with an inaccuracy, it can easily be exaggerated, but when speech begins with truth, it can bring happiness.

I came to know that people were talking about my minor fall and the resulting injury. Really? People are actually that interested in me? How pleasing. I mean, if a worker on the street fell and broke their leg, who would bother discussing it with others?

When people share information, sometimes it is directly communicated from one person who actually knows it to be true to the next, or it can spread by people passing on to others what they heard through the grapevine. The orthopedist's words were: "You are fortunate, venerable sir. You have only a minor fracture. It's not a complete break, so it's not that big a deal. It should heal after about a week's worth of rest." He even added joyfully, "and your students can get merit from doing more tasks and chores around the monastery for you."

I noticed that as news of the doctor's assessment spread, the diagnosis of a bone fracture got more and more overstated. There were all sorts of exaggerations, like, "Yaw Sayadaw's been admitted to the hospital," "He had a stoke and fell," "He broke his thigh," "He broke both of his legs and they were shaking wildly," "He broke both of his upper arms," "He broke his collar bone and ribs." People take what they hear and embellish it based on their imaginations. If you have something good to say, even if you shout it through a loudspeaker, it might not be heard very well. But if you utter some nonsense in a hushed voice, it tends to find a way to spread on its own.

I got asked things like, "How long were you in the hospital for, venerable sir? I heard you broke your leg, yet I see you can already walk on it again?" "I heard you got a broken bone. Does it still hurt?" People were quite interested in what happened, but as we know, the body is prone to change and go into decline at any time.

I overheard some young people talking on the street as I was on my way to give a talk at a Dhamma function. "There goes Yaw Sayadaw. It must not be true that he was admitted to the hospital. People just irresponsibly say what they want without knowing the facts."

My guest left on the day of the full moon. I invited it to come back sometime. We can only progress quickly on the path if we have the benefit of a strong push from such a guest. To practice the Dhamma is to contend with the forces of suffering—of aging, illness, and death, and the fires of the kilesas. To do so successfully, we need to stay one step ahead of them whenever they come to visit us. Dukkha and the kilesas are the main target of the Dhamma. We wouldn't have things like football games and boxing matches if there were

only one side; there must be two sides to a challenge. Only by limiting and overcoming dukkha and the kilesas can we be victorious in the Dhamma. Dukkha and the kilesas are the team of darkness. Our team, the team of the Dhamma, is the team of light, and sati is the leader of our team.

May you all be well, happy, and peaceful.
Tipitaka Yaw Sayadaw
February 2007

Glossary

Anattā: Not-self.

Anicca: Impermanent, inconstant.

Arahaṃ: Worthy, venerable.

Arahant: "Worthy one", one who has attained complete awakening.

Bodhisatta: A being destined to Buddhahood, a Buddha-to-be.

Dukkha: Stress, discomfort, suffering—brought on by birth, aging, and death; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair; association with the unbeloved; separation from the loved; and not getting what is wanted. In brief, the five clinging-aggregates are dukkha. [Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Saṁyutta Nikāya 56:11].

Kamma: Intention—expressed through physical action, speech, or thought. [Nibbedhika Sutta, Aṅguttara Nikāya 6:63].

Khandhas: Aggregates, which condition the appearance of life in any form. There are five: rūpa (physical form); vedanā (three modes of feeling—pleasure, pain, or indifferent); saññā (perception); saṅkhāra (thought construct), and viññāṇa (consciousness).

Kilesas: Defilements, impurities of mind: lobha (greed), dosa (anger), moha (delusion), māna (conceit), ditthi (wrong view), vicikicchā (doubt), thīna (mental torpor), uddhacca (distraction), ahirika (shamelessness), and anottappa (lack of compunction). [Vibhaṅga XII].

Kusala: Virtue, good action, merit; skillful, wholesome.

Nibbāna: Liberation; the release of the mind from all kilesā, and from the entire round of death and rebirth.

Pāramis: Qualities to be developed that support the path to awakening: Dāna (generosity), Sīla (virtue), Nekkhamma (renunciation of sensuality, and of the household life for

monastics), Paññā (wisdom), Viriya (persistence), Khanti (patience, forbearance), Sacca (truthfulness), Adhiṭṭhāna (determination), Mettā (goodwill), Upekkhā (equanimity).

Samatha: Tranquillity, calm, quietude of heart.

Saṁsāra: Transmigration, wandering through the cycle of rebirth and death.

Sati: Memory, mindfulness.

Vipassanā: Insight.

Tipitaka Yaw Sayadaw

Yaw Sayadaw (Ashin Sirindabhivamsa) was born in Letpan Village, Gangaw Township, Magwe Division, Myanmar on March 26, 1943 (the 6th Waning day of the month of TaBaung, in Myanmar Era 1304) to parents U Ye Naing and Daw Toke Khaing. He became a novice at age fourteen and again at age eighteen, and was fully ordained at the age of twenty with the name Ashin Sirinda. He went on to continue his studies of the Pāli Tipiṭaka, its commentaries, and subcommentaries in Mandalay and Yangon. Sayadaw's decades' worth of extensive study of the Vinaya, Sutta, and Abhidhamma Piṭakas at the highest levels culminated in him being awarded the title of Tipiṭakadhara Tipiṭakakawida, or, "One who knows the Tipiṭaka by heart." Sayadaw is currently the abbot of Mahavisuddharama TaikThit Monastery in Yangon, and oversees several other monasteries in Myanmar.